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CIA Linked To Killing of Drug Charge

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CHICAGO, June 18—The Central Intelligence Agency forced the Department of Justice to drop charges against one of its agents who helped smuggle more than 100 pounds of raw opium from Thailand to Chicago, an investigation by the Chicago Daily News has disclosed.

The CIA told top officials in the Justice Department that they could not prosecute its agent, who was arrested and indicted in Chicago.

The CIA said if its agent were tried on the opium-smuggling charge, "the situation could prove embarrassing to the CIA," according to documents obtained by the Chicago Daily News.

The CIA admitted that the agent was a native-born Thai with a history of undercover work for the spy agency in Thailand, Burma, and elsewhere in the Golden Triangle of Southeast Asia. This area is the source of 70 per cent of the world's opium, from which heroin is derived.

The opium was smuggled into the United States in 25 newsreel film cans bearing the insignia of an American missionary group. It was marked "unexposed film," but was discovered by customs inspectors in New York.

The cans of opium were to be delivered to the Phocis Films Co. in Chicago and later were to have been converted into heroin with a street value of $3.5 million.

Clandestine laboratories for processing the raw opium into heroin were located in the Berkeley, Calif., area and in New York, according to federal documents.

The CIA helped the hill people of Southeast Asia get their opium crop—the mainstay of their economy—to market.

In return, the hill people pledged cooperation with the United States in its battle against Communism.

This is believed to be the first time any CIA personnel have been directly linked to the smuggling of opium into the United States.

The CIA agent involved is Puttaporn Khramkhruan, 31, a former lieutenant in the Chinese Nationalist Army who served with guerrilla forces in Burma before being recruited into the CIA. Khramkhruan was paid $600 a month by the CIA. He now lives in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Khramkhruan was arrested and indicted in Chicago in August, 1973, after he completed a course at Syracuse University in New York.

The course was sponsored by the Agency for International Development, a branch of the State Department.

According to the indictment returned here, Khramkhruan twice took part in the illegal shipment of opium to Chicago while he was working for the CIA in Thailand. Six others here indicted with him. One shipment of 44 pounds of opium was smuggled through customs to Phocis offices in January, 1972.

The second shipment of 60 pounds was intercepted by customs officials in New York and delivered to Phocis Films by Postal Service inspectors working undercover with the Chicago office of U.S. Attorney James R. Thompson of the Northern Illinois district.

Thompson, who admitted the case was "quite unusual," said it was discussed at the highest levels in the Justice Department and in the CIA in Washington, D.C., during the spring of 1974.